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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 3915
RUEHOR/AMEMBASSY GABORONE 0164
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2788
RUEHTO/AMEMBASSY MAPUTO 0303
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C O N F I D E N T I A L GENEVA 000424

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UNHRC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: OHCHR'S CONTINUED EFFORTS ON ZIMBABWE

REF: A. GENEVA 410

[1](#)B. GENEVA 360

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Storella. Reasons: 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) sees its principal challenge as being to press Zimbabwe in public as hard as it can on human rights without jeopardizing its ability to continue its works on the ground there. Despite expressing reservations to the DCM in a recent meeting that public statements critical of Harare could block whatever limited work OHCHR is doing on the ground in Zimbabwe, High Commissioner Arbour issued a May 28 statement condemning the murder of opposition activists. OHCHR is planning to send a Pretoria-based mid-level officer back to Zimbabwe on June 9 and a lower-level officer there on June 14, and hopes to add more staff on the ground in future. At the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Zimbabwe is expected to come up for sharp criticism by several countries during a June 6 plenary session, although prospects for anything beyond that look bleak. END SUMMARY.

ARBOUR SPEAKS OUT

[1](#)2. (C) On the margins of a May 26 meeting with High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour on other issues (ref a), the DCM noted the importance of strong public statements of concern about developments in Zimbabwe. Arbour said that her prio}QCmQ public statement focusing on the murders of opposition activists. In her statement, she expressed shock at the murders and condemned both them and the continuing harassment of NGO workers, human rights defenders and other members of civil society. She urged the Zimbabwean authorities to investigate and prosecute those responsible for those actions and take other steps to create an atmosphere conducive to a free and fair presidential election. She also noted the violence against migrants and refugees in South Africa and welcomed the South African government's recent steps to clamp down on xenophobic violence.

OHCHR WORK ON THE GROUND

[1](#)4. (C) As noted ref b, OHCHR had been encouraged by the work of its staff members on the ground in Zimbabwe and hoped to send them back. OHCHR Africa Unit head Scott Campbell told us June 5 that he was hopeful of the return of those staffers to Zimbabwe, despite some concerns that the Zimbabwe

government would refuse to permit it in response to Arbour's latest statement. Current plans are for the head of OHCHR's regional office in Pretoria to return to Harare on June 9 for a short visit, with the Zimbabwe desk officer to follow on June 14 for a longer stay. According to Campbell, OHCHR is exploring the possibility of sending additional staff members there as soon as possible, although no details have been worked out. On June 6, Campbell told us that plans had not changed despite the latest deterioration in the situation in Zimbabwe, although OHCHR would keep a particularly close eye on the treatment of its staff on the ground in light of the incident involving U.S. and UK diplomats.

15. (C) During their previous stints in Zimbabwe, OHCHR staffers had worked closely with the UNDP Resident Coordinator, Campbell continued. This had resulted in joint meetings with the Ministers of Defense and Justice, among others, which had been of at least some benefit (ref b). The staffers would continue their work with UNDP, which they would also press to be more active on other fronts, Campbell said.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ACTIVITY

16. (SBU) A number of countries have long sought to use the Human Rights Council to highlight Zimbabwe's human rights problems. At least a few, including Canada, Australia and the EU, plan to raise Zimbabwe under the June 6 agenda item on country situations (Item 4). A representative of the International Commission of Jurists told us June 4 that his NGO was seeking support for a Council resolution or at least presidential statement on Zimbabwe. He reported that a few African delegations had expressed qualified support but acknowledged that South Africa was almost certain to block the idea. In ICJ's view, the proposal should only be advanced if it is done under the leadership of the Africa Group.

COMMENT

17. (C) OHCHR is struggling to decide how best to respond to the recent deterioration in Zimbabwe's human rights situation. It recognizes the limits of what it can accomplish, and is casting about for how to maximize its effectiveness. It is likely to continue using a combination of public statements and, to the extent the Zimbabwe government permits, work on the ground.

TICHENOR